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Hell's Guardian

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CREMATOR



CREMATOR

#1 (of 5)

Welcome To Hell!

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Story So Far

This story begins right after Lady Death's disappearance from Hell in Chaos! Quarterly #1 (September 1995). With Lady Death and Lucifer gone from Hell the Inferno quickly falls into a state of anarchy as rival demons and Archdukes struggle to seize the throne of Hell. Meanwhile the Blacksmith of Hell Cremator uncovers a plot of angelic origin that threatens to destroy all of Hell. In desperation Cremator journeys to the Hell-city of Dis hoping to gain allies only to be betrayed and imprisoned within the Dungeons of Dis.

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SOMEWHERE BELOW THE SURFACE OF HELL.

IN A DARK PRISON CHAMBER
HUNCHED OVER HIS BURDEN,
THE CONDEMNED CHRONICLER
COMMITS THE INFERNAL STORY
OF HELL TO AN ANCIENT TOME.

FOREVER DAMNED BY LUCIFER
HIMSELF, THE CHRONICLER IS
SENTENCED TO TOIL UNTIL
JUDGMENT DAY, WHEN THE
DEAD OVERCOME THE EARTH
AND HEAVEN'S LIGHT PIERCES
HELL'S BORDERS ONE LAST TIME.

AWAY!
AWAY, YOU
SENILE INSECTS!
DON'T YOU SEE?
I'VE A STORY
TO TELL!

AS ACID STINGS OF DEMONIC INSECTS
STAB HIS BODY RELENTLESSLY, HE
RECALLS RECENT EVENTS:

And then Lady Death vanquished Lucifer and set in motion a chain of events that began the *Civil War* of hell.

Lady Death's partner, a surly sort named Cremator uncovered a plot by *The Trinity of Evil*. An ambitious trio, they seek the complete annihilation of hell.

As he headed to the Hell city Dis, Cremator believed he found an ally in the mad angel *Apolyon*.

He was dreadfully wrong.

As the turmoil mounts throughout the region, arch dukes, arch fiends, overlords and other assorted ill reputes crawl up from the mire of their pitiful existence and claim sovereignty over Lucifer's domain.

Fiends like Pagan, the court jester of hell.

For the aforementioned mad angel, Apolyon.

And the list goes on, and on.

In short, it is **CHAOS!**

And, caught within this blossoming flower of madness, is a being who once was a thief and an artisan, but is now a dire, condemned soul sure to perish among the countless denizens.

He is Cremator, blacksmith to the arch dukes of Hell!

Caught up to the present, The Chronicler records the events as the story unfolds.

APOLYON!
WE MUST
ESCAPE!
NOW!



WE? I
THINK NOT,
CREMATOR. ONLY
I AM MEANT FOR
DIVINITY! YOU, ON
THE OTHER HAND,
YOU ARE A MINOR
FOOTNOTE IN
HISTORY.
THIS
CRUMBLING
DUNGEON
IS MY GIFT
TO YOU.

HELLPPP!

SAAAY YEE MEEE!



YOU
BASTARD!



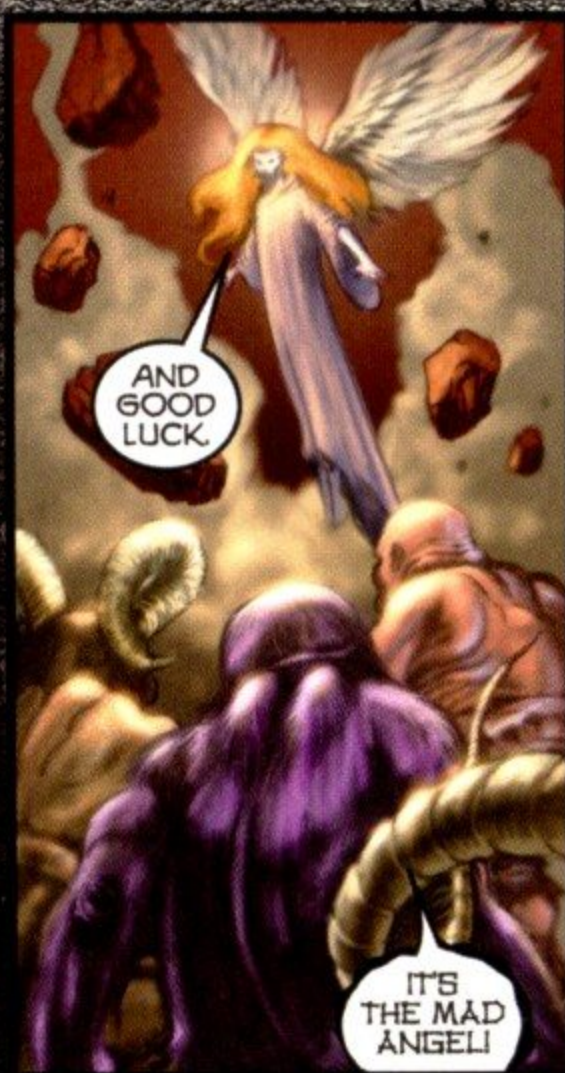
NOOOOOO!

DAMN THE
DAY I ALLIED
MYSELF WITH THAT
MAD FOOL! HE
CAUSED THIS
HELLQUAKE!

RUN!



BEST WISHES,
BLACKSMITH!



AND
GOOD
LUCK.

IT'S
THE MAD
ANGEL!



LET'S
TEAR THE
SKIN FROM
HIS
BONES!

BIND
HIM IN
BEETLE
DUNG!



MAD?
SURELY THAT
IS A MATTER OF
PERSPECTIVE!

BOOM!

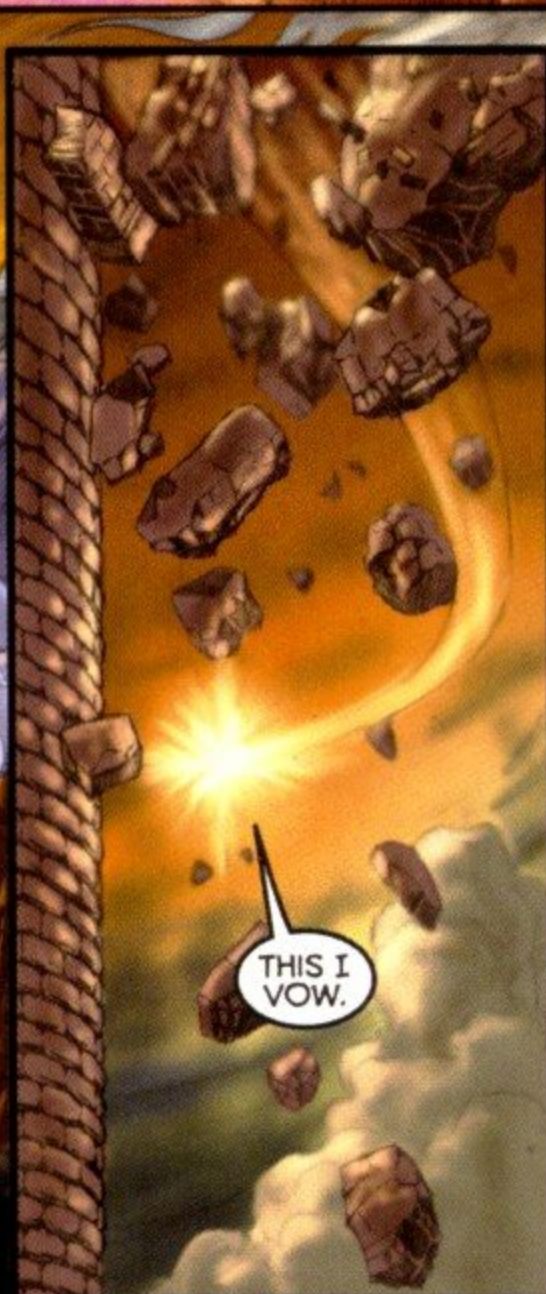


SOON THIS
REALM WILL BE
LAID PLAIN.

NO
MORE SKIES
LIT BY FIRE. NO
PITS OF ETERNAL
DAMNATION.
NO
BARTERING
FOR HUMAN
SOULS!



LIKE THIS TOWERING
CITY I'VE
DECIMATED, HELL
WILL BE A FAINT
MEMORY.



THIS I
VOW.

DOWN BELOW.

SO
APOLYON
CONDEMNS
ME TO PERISH?

WELL, I'M
NOT EAGER FOR
THE END! AHEAD OF ME
THE DUNGEON DOORS!

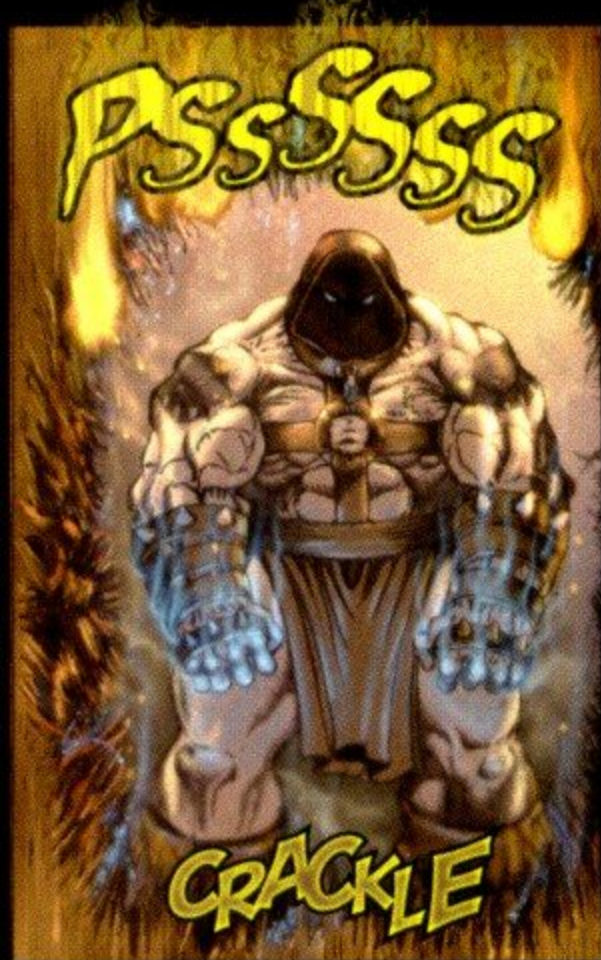


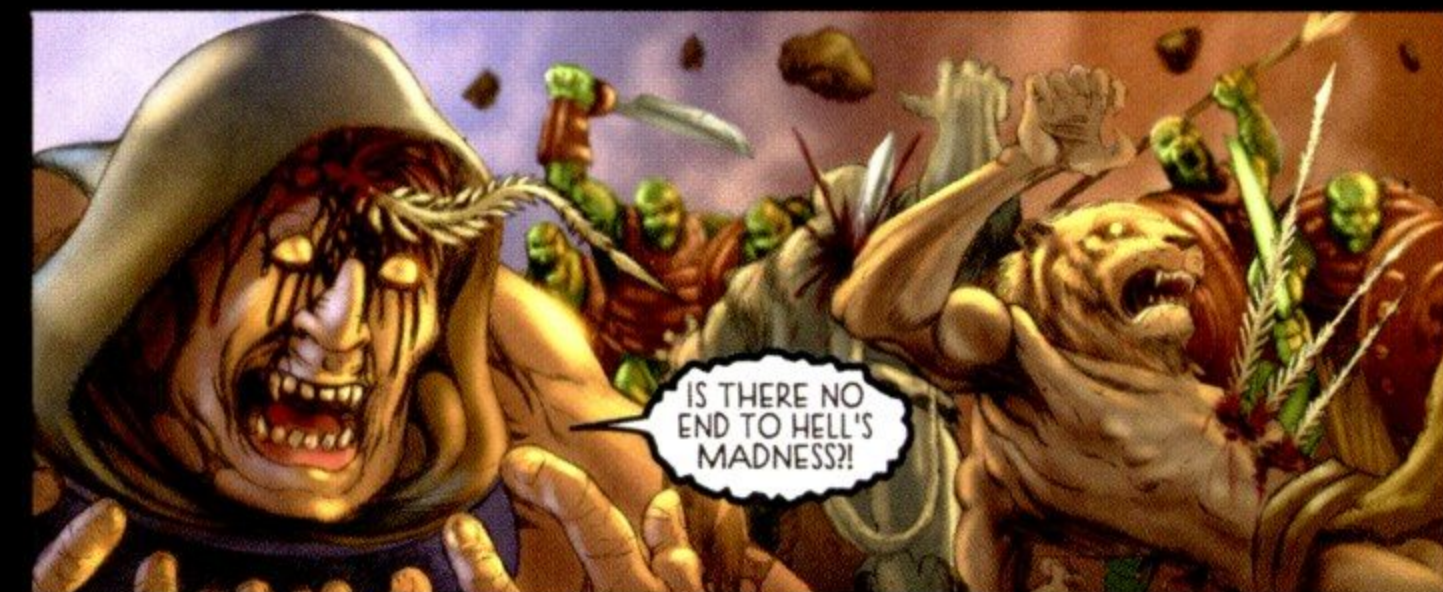
I BEG OF YOU -
SALVATION!

SEETHING, CREMATOR'S
HANDS EXPLODE WITH
ARCANE ENERGY.

FOR MY
HONOR!
FOR MY
LADY!

**FOR THE
SAKE OF
HELL!**





AS HIS CONSCIOUSNESS
SWAYS, CREMATOR
SEARCHES FRANTICALLY
FOR ANY THOUGHT OR
MEMORY THAT MIGHT
SAVE HIM.

THEN, AS IF IN
RESPONSE...

...HER.

SHE'S A DARK VISION OF HOPE. SHE
GAVE HIS AFTERLIFE MEANING, BUT NOW
SHE IS GONE, STOLEN FROM HIM.

HER VISAGE STARES DOWN AS
IF JUDGING HIM. A LOOK OF
DISAPPOINTMENT CLEARLY
ETCHED ON HER FACE.

LADY
DEATH?

I HAVE
FAILED
YOU.

YOU'VE
COME FOR ME, IS
THAT IT? IS IT MY
DYING TIME?

I KNOW
WHAT YOU'RE
THINKING.

I PLEDGED
TO OVERSEE
HELL IN YOUR
ABSENCE.

I FAILED.
DO NOT
ABANDON
ME!

NO! SHE'S NOT
ABANDONING ME!
IT'S A MESSAGE!

I AM
ON MY
OWN!

HELL'S
FATE IS LEFT
TO ME!

TO ME!

I WILL NOT
FAIL!

DARK RAGE RISES FROM DEEP
WITHIN CREMATOR'S SOUL AS
THE GROUND BELOW HIS FEET
BEGINS TO MOAN AND
GRIMACE. ENERGY AS OLD AS
HELL ITSELF FORCES UP FROM
THE DEPTHS.



CREMATOR'S DELIRIUM
INDUCED VISION ARE
GONE. NO REGRETS. NO
CONCERNS.

IS THAT
ALL? YES! THAT'S
RIGHT! KEEP
COMING!
FACE ME!

FACE
ME!

YOUR
TIME TO
DIE HAS
COME!

I
WILL NOT
Fail!

AMIDST HIS BLIND FURY, CREMATOR FAILS TO NOTICE THE SUPPORT STRUCTURES OF THE CITY OF DIS COLLAPSE HERALDING THE END.

EVEN MAGICALLY ERECTED ARCHITECTURE GIVES WAY TO THE FORCES OF NATURE NOW AND THEN.

COME ON! COME ON!
WHO'S NEXT?!

GOOD.
GOOD!

WITH LUCIFER'S DESTRUCTION AND LADY DEATH'S DISAPPEARANCE, FEAR AND ANARCHY RUN RAMPANT THROUGH HELL.

NOW IS THE TIME FOR ME TO STRIKE!
NOW I SHALL TAKE CONTROL OF HELL!

WHY DOES MY CRYSTALLINE BALL CHOOSE TO SHOW ME THE LOWLY BLACKSMITH CREMATOR?

BAHI! LOOK AT HIM. HIS MUCH VAUNTED ANGER IS GETTING THE BEST OF HIM. HE'S BOUND TO BURY HIMSELF, MISGUIDED NINNY.

XETAL...
MONARCH OF HELL THAT SOUNDS SO VERY, VERY... FITTING.

WHO?!

HUH?
NOTHING.
GHOSTS.

AND IF THERE IS NO HELL TO RULE, WHAT THEN, LITTLE DEMONLORD?

NO, WAIT!

WHO DARES TO INVADE MY SANCTUM!

I WARN YOU!
YOU TRIFLE WITH POWERS BEYOND YOUR COMPREHENSION. THE ARCHDUKES OF HELL WILL NOT TOLERATE THIS INTRUSION -

KA
KLINK



APOLYONI

SURPRISED?

I SUPPOSE
SPELLS FROM THE
BOOK OF APOCRYPHA
SHOULD HAVE SHIELDED
YOUR DOMAIN FROM
ME, IS THAT
IT?

YOUR
PROPOSED
CONQUEST OF HELL
IS **UNTIMELY**, XETAL.
INAPPROPRIATE.

BEGONE!

BESIDES, DOMINION
OVER THE INFERNO
REQUIRES A BROAD
VIEW OF REALITY. YOU
LACK IN THAT AREA,
XETAL.

YOU'RE... A
MAD MAN

MAD?! I PREFER...
PASSIONATE.

YOU SEE,
YOU LITTLE
TOAD, THE RULE
OF **HELL** IS NOT
SPARE CHANGE TO
BE PASSED FROM
HAND TO
HAND!

RULE
REQUIRES
VISION.





HOW I
ENVY YOU,
LITTLE TOAD.
SERENITY IS
YOURS.



IF
YOU INDEED
POSSESSED THE
BOOK OF APOCRYPHA
YOU MIGHT HAVE
SUCCEEDED,
BUT IT WAS STOLEN
FROM YOU LONG
AGO.

WHERE IS
THE BOOK? A
MYSTERY.



NOW.
WHO ELSE
NEEDS DYING
THIS DAY?



THAT ANGEL IS
MAD INDEED.
MAD OR PLAIN
INSIPID.

HE LEFT
WITHOUT
CLAIMING XETAL'S
ENCHANTED
CRYSTALLINE
BALL.



I'LL TAKE
THAT, MY
CRISPY
FRIEND.



COWARDS!
DON'T RUN!



NOW
WHAT?

LAVA?
IT'S EVERY-
WHERE!
DID THE
SHEER WEIGHT
OF THE CITY'S
COLLAPSE
TRIGGERED AN
ERUPTION?

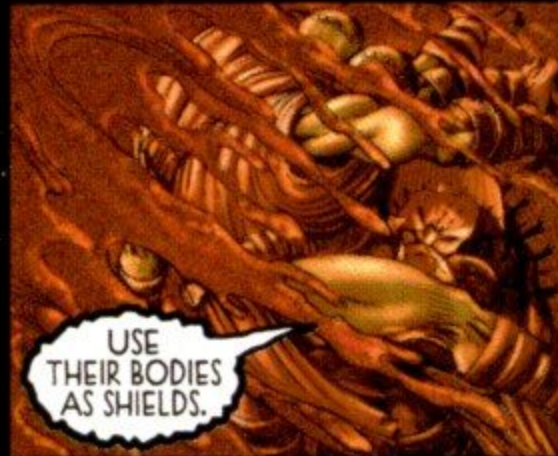


THIS IS
INSANE.
WILL IT
END?

DEATH
TO LADY
DEATH'S
MONGRELI



LAVA!



USE
THEIR BODIES
AS SHIELDS.



OH...



... NO.



RARRAAGG!

AS HE PREPARES FOR THE END, CREMATOR CURSES THE FATES!



WHAT?!



DRAGONS!



CAN I GET TO --
AHHK!



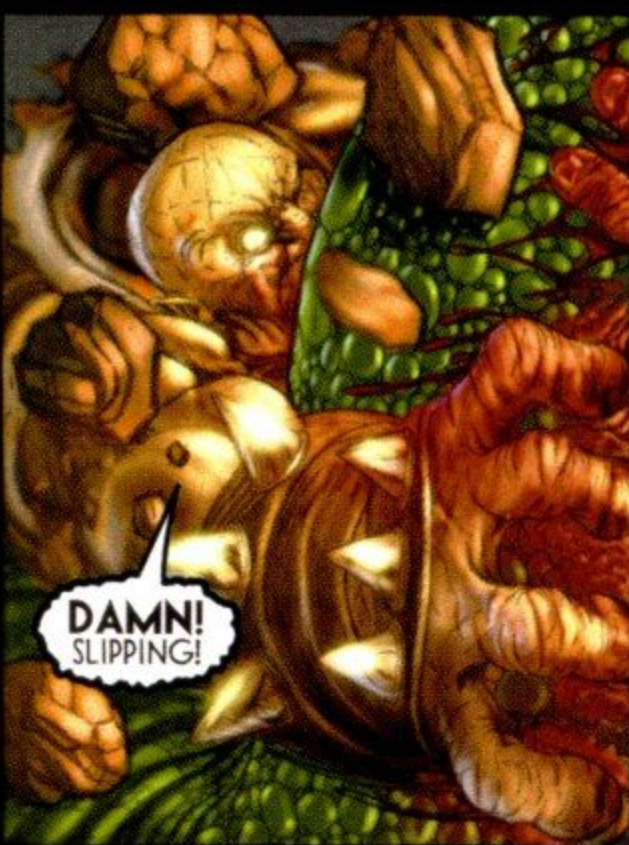
AS HE WITNESSES THE FIRST DRAGON STRUCK DOWN, CREMATOR WHISPERS AN OLD PRAYER TO THE NORTHERN GODS OF HIS YOUTH.



RUN!



KATOOOM





AS BLOOD DRAINS OUT
OF CREMATOR'S BODY,
DARK MEMORIES FROM
HIS PAST RISE UP...



GOD
DAMN YOU!
WE TRUSTED YOU!
YOU BETRAYED
US!



WHY, MATTHIAS, WHY?

MARKO, YOU ARE NAIVE, YOU MUST ADMIT THAT.

I SWORE ALLEGIANCE TO THE LORDS OF THE ABYSS. TOGETHER, WE SHALL TURN MANKIND AWAY FROM THE FALSE GOD AND HIS WRETCHED CROSS-BEARING FOLLOWERS.



IT'S SIMPLE.



OUR KIN WILL HUNT YOU AND YOUR ACCURSED FOLLOWERS DOWN!

WE WILL BE AVENGED! THIS IS...



... ISABELLA!

... OH NO... ISABELLA, NO...



YOU WILL BURN IN HELL FOR THIS, I SWEAR!

SSSHHH, MY FRIEND. CALM YOURSELF.

IN THE NAME OF ALL THAT'S HOLY I CURSE YOU, MATTHIAS! YOU AND YOUR HEIRS WILL BURN IN HELL!

PERHAPS... BUT YOU FIRST.



I...



CURSE...



...YOU!

HAVE NO FEAR, MY FRIEND. *PAGAN* SHALL OFFER YOU A DEAL. ONE SOUL GOES TO HEAVEN, ONE GOES TO HELL. WHO SHALL IT BE?



YOU OR YOUR LOVELY WIFE? CHOOSE.

I... I WILL GO TO HELL.



DON'T WORRY, MARKO. KNOWING YOU AS WELL AS I DO, I HAVE NO DOUBT THAT YOU'LL GO FAR IN HELL. PERHAPS YOU'LL EVEN GET AHEAD!

HAHAHA



... ISABELLA... I... WILL... NOT... FAIL...

ELSEWHERE IN HELL,
NEAR THE CHARRED
REMAINS OF XETAL --

SO THE
DENIZENS OF
HELL THINK THEY
CAN DISPOSE
OF ME EASILY,
EH?

I'M FAR,
FAR TOO MEAN
SPIRITED A *JOKER*
TO LET THAT
HAPPEN.

IN FACT,
MY TRICKS HAVE HARDLY
BEGUN. THIS CIVIL WAR IS THE
PERFECT COVER FOR MY
MACHINATIONS.

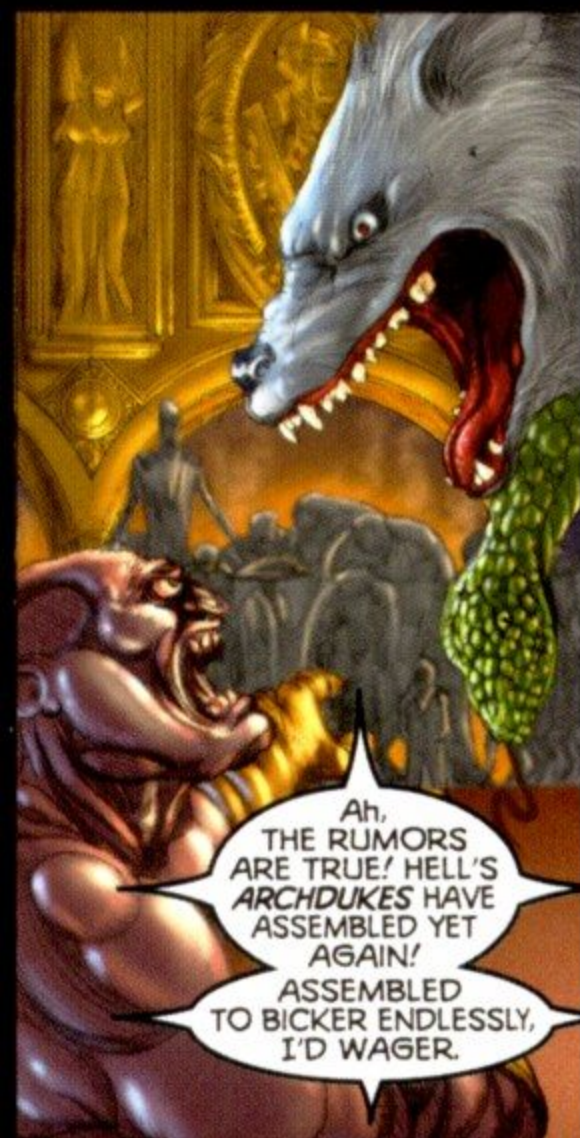
I PREPARE
THEE IN MY NAME,
I EMPOWER THEE
IN MY NAME AND I
BIND THEE IN MY
NAME.

VASTROSS
EN'DINIUM.

SAFARISS
'ENTU DIAMASS
FINIS

THE
SPELL IS COMPLETE.
THE CRYSTALLINE BALL
IS MINE -- AND *ONLY* MINE!

I *COMMAND*
YOU! REVEAL TO ME THE
FACES OF MY FIERCEST FOES!



Ah,
THE RUMORS
ARE TRUE! HELL'S
ARCHDUKES HAVE
ASSEMBLED YET
AGAIN!
ASSEMBLED
TO BICKER ENDLESSLY,
I'D WAGER.



ASTEROTH!

LUCIFER'S
TRUMP CARD.
HAS HE RETURNED
FROM *PLAYING*
WITH LADY
DEATH?

BEST
TO STAY
OUT OF HIS
WAY.



THE
TRINITY OF
EVIL!

SCARY!



APOLYON.
HMMMM. HE
IS THE WILD CARD
IN THIS CIVIL WAR.
THE MAD ONE WILL
REQUIRE *SPECIAL*
ATTENTION.



WHO
ELSE? WHO
ELSE IS MY
FOE?



A BLOOD
STAINED GARGOYLE?
THIS MAKES NO
SENSE.



A TRAIL OF
BODIES? WHO AM I
FOLLOWING?

I LOVE
A MYSTERY --
BUT NOT FOR
LONG.



WHO-
EVER THIS
FOE IS, I AM
IMPRESSED.



CREMATOR?
THE PIN CUSHION
OF HELL IS ONE OF MY
MOST DEADLY
FOES?



I...
... WILL...
... NOT...
... FAIL!

THERE
HE IS! KILL
HIM!

KILL
CREMATOR!

NEXT:
Sacrifice!